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Top spies push expert to watch over CIA chief

By James Coates

Chicago Tribune Press Service

WASHINGTON — Intelligence community insiders will press hard to elevate a CIA expert on Soviet nuclear weapons to a top job in order to prevent CIA Director William J. Casey from incorporating a partisan bias in agency reports, The Tribune has learned.

The behind-the-scenes move to make R. E. Hineman head of foreign intelligence assessments at the CIA is the latest in a series of efforts to keep Casey, a major political operative in President Reagan's campaign, from politicizing agency reports.

The CIA reports are crucial to U.S. foreign and military policymakers, who use them to determine such things as Soviet military intentions, the accuracy of Soviet weapons, and potential successors to Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev.

Casey's detractors have long warned that the 69-year-old conservative was ordering subordinates to slant their reports to reflect his personal headline views.

THE RECENT SURPRISE resignation of Adm. Bobby Ray Inman as Casey's deputy revived these concerns by such key leaders as Sen. Barry Goldwater (R., Ariz.) and Rep. Richard Lugar (R., Ind.).

In the wake of Inman's resignation, Lugar and Goldwater — widely viewed as hardliners themselves — stunned many agency insiders by publicly accusing Casey of lacking objectivity.

Lugar, a former Navy intelligence officer, said that "there are simply complexities involved (in preparing assessments) that would take more years than Bill Casey has" to grasp.

Goldwater said bluntly of Casey: "He is not a pro." Sending an obvious signal to the White House and to CIA headquarters, both senators warned that their past support of Casey was given grudgingly and only because Reagan made Inman, a 51-year-old career intelligence professional, Casey's No. 2 man.

The administration moved quickly last week to mollify Lugar, Goldwater and other members of the House and Senate Intelligence Committees by naming as Inman's successor John McMahon, who had been in charge of preparing the reports assessing Soviet and other foreign adversaries' future behavior.

McMAHON, A VETERAN of the CIA and its recent bureaucratic shakeups, was a welcome choice to the congressional critics, sources on Capitol Hill said.

McMahon had been shuffled about at the CIA early in the Reagan administration during the disastrous effort to install a political ally of Casey, Max Hugel, as chief of the agency's covert operations.

Hugel, a sewing machine importer, directed Reagan's political campaign in New Hampshire and became a close friend of Casey.

Intelligence professionals expressed dismay when Casey placed Hugel in charge of covert operations, the CIA branch that includes all the agency's clandestine operations abroad.

Hugel resigned last summer in a furor over charges that he manipulated stock sales and was replaced by John Stein, a seasoned intelligence expert who served as station chief in Cambodia in 1971 and 1972.

REACTING to the Hugel scandal, the agency drastically reorganized its top command. McMahon was named executive director, and a bright young careerist, Robert Gates, became chief of foreign assessments, with Hineman as his deputy.

There now are strong indications that Gates, one of the fastest-rising CIA men in the agency's history, will become executive director, leaving his intelligence assessment post open.

Fierce bureaucratic in-fighting has erupted in a drive to get Hineman into Gates' vacated position.

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